

Transformational Leadership

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In either 469 or 470 BCE, Socrates was born near the outskirts of Athens. The son of a stonemason and a midwife, Socrates apprenticed under his father and is said to have frequented the Agora; the city's central market and meeting place for men of politics (Durant, 1966). An inquisitive youth, Socrates is said to have studied philosophy under Archelaus, a student of Anaxagoras. In 431 BCE, the Greek world became engulfed in the Peloponnesian War. The conflict would go on intermittently between the Delian League, led by Athens, and the Peloponnesian League, led by Sparta, for roughly 25 years (Thucydides, 1972). In that time, Socrates, who served as a hoplite, is credited with participating in three battles: the Battle of Potidaea in 432 BCE which was a precursor to the war, the Battle of Delium in 424 BCE, and the Battle of Amphipolis in 422 BCE. Following his service, Socrates was appointed as a member of the *Boule*, a council of 500 citizens who managed the daily affairs of Athens (Durant, 1966). By 423 BCE, Socrates was already well known enough to have been satirized in the play, *The Clouds* by Aristophanes and to have likely already earned the nickname, the gadfly of Athens.

In 399 BCE, Socrates was put on trial for being "a doer of evil, and corrupter of the youth," as well as not believing "in the gods of the state" and for having "new divinities of his own" (Plato, 2009). The charges followed the return of the Athenian democracy, for which Socrates was an outspoken opponent, after the brief rule of the Thirty Tyrants. The gadfly, it seemed, had become enough of a nuisance to be silenced. Following a guilty verdict, he was sentenced to death. This ultimately leaves us with the question of why was he actually condemned as it was revealed in his trial that he was rather pious, in his own fashion, and did not have any official standing in the city as a teacher, unlike other philosophers who ran academies or the sophists who orated for money. As a leader of men, Socrates did not fit the

traditional mold. He was, by all accounts, ugly and unkempt. He did not bathe regularly, was crass, and had little tolerance for those he felt were beneath him intellectually. How, then, did he come to represent the model philosopher and stand as the demarcation between what we now consider pre- and post-Socratic philosophy? He did so because he was a transformational leader who embodied the 4 I's: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration (Northhouse, 2019).

At the heart of transformational leadership is the ability of the leader to see the hidden potential in followers. To that end, the transformational leader embodies the 4 I's stated previously. The first of those I's is Idealized Influence and is the leader's ability to *walk the walk*, so to speak. As a teacher and leader, Socrates presented a strong role model for his followers to emulate. Perhaps no greater example of this is highlighted in Plato's (2009) *Apology* where Socrates states: "Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy... but whatever you do, know that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times." While awaiting his execution, Socrates was visited by his follower Crito who offered his master three reasons he should escape the city: first, by staying rather than fleeing, outsiders would suspect that Socrates' followers had left him to die; second, that if Socrates were concerned with the cost, his followers and friends were more than happy to pay for his life in exile; and third, that his death would leave his children fatherless (Plato, 2009). Socrates answered Crito's first question by saying, "We must not regard what the many say of us: but what he, the one man who has understanding of just and unjust, will say, and what the truth will say" (Plato, 2009). He continued by asking Crito two questions: first, is it "that not life, but a good life, is to be chiefly valued?"; and second, in escaping, "do I not desert the principles which were acknowledged by us to be just?" (Plato, 2009). Essentially, Socrates used the moment to

impart his final lesson to Crito; the wise man does not listen to the crowd but is guided by reason, logic, and truth and that the just man does no harm to his fellow man even at the expense of his own life. Following the dialogue with Crito, Socrates, surrounded by friends and strangers, remained true to this word and drank the poison when it was given to him. With such a model for his followers to emulate, Socrates showed true transformational leadership and provided them with “a vision and a sense of mission” in what a philosopher should be (Northhouse, 2019).

To say that transformational leaders possess charisma would be an understatement. However, rather than leading merely with charm or a sort of modern-day glamour, the transformational leader's charisma has depth. The first aspect of that depth is the first of the 4 I's, Idealized Influence. The second half of the transformational leader's charisma is the second I, Inspirational Motivation. Just as Idealized Influence is a leader's ability to *walk the walk*, Inspirational Motivation is their ability to *talk the talk*. As noted in Northhouse (2019), “This factor is descriptive of leaders who communicate high expectations to followers, inspiring them through motivation to become committed to and part of a shared vision.” For Socrates, two of his most famous students provide insight into both his success and failure as just such a leader. They are Alcibiades and Critias.

Both Alcibiades and Critias were famous as agents of Sparta both during and following the Peloponnesian War which ended in 404 BCE with Athens' defeat. During the war, Alcibiades, at one point or another, served the Delian League, the Peloponnesian League, and the Achaemenid Empire. This disregard for his countryman and constant playing of one side against the other reflected poorly on Socrates as the two men had been close. Critias, following the Battle of Aegospotami, was among those chosen to lead Athens by Lysander, the Spartan admiral who had ended the war in the aforementioned battle. As Socrates' two most famous

students at the time, his anti-democratic rhetoric was central to the frustrations that led to his trial in 399 BCE. In *Apology*, Socrates argued that because he did not accept money for teaching, he could not be considered a teacher. Rather, Socrates contended, he took it upon himself to engage in public dialogues in which he would show that so-called wise men actually knew very little. This drew the attention of many, including Alcibiades and Critias. For example, in Plato's (2009) *The Republic*, Socrates provided a metaphor for the state as a ship. He described the perfect captain as a trained and wise philosopher-king dedicated to truth. The captain knows how to steer the helm and how to navigate the seas but is always at odds with an ignorant crew who seek to mutiny. As we can see, even if Socrates was not a teacher in the traditional sense, his words motivated many to follow and learn from his example.

The third of the 4 I's associated with transformational leadership is Intellectual Stimulation. Northhouse (2019) provides us with this definition: Intellectual Stimulation is "leadership that stimulates followers to be creative and innovative and to challenge their own beliefs and values as well as those of the leader." Throughout Plato's writings, we are presented with examples of Socrates engaged in various dialogues. These dialogues form the basis of our understanding of the Socratic Method. In *Apology*, Socrates related to us a story in which one of his followers, Chaerephon, visits the Temple of Apollo in Delphi to ask the Oracle there a question. Socrates continued, "he asked the oracle to tell him whether there was anyone wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered that there was no man wiser" (Plato, 2009). This perplexed Socrates who noted, "I know that I have no wisdom, small or great" (Plato, 2009). This is, perhaps, the moment that changed the nature of philosophy into a pre- and post-Socratic understanding. Following the revelation that he was the wisest man in Athens, Socrates set himself to riddling out the meaning of the Oracle's words. He engaged in dialogues with experts presenting himself as a student wishing to learn, as he did when discussing the

gods with Euthyphro exclaiming, “Rare friend! I think that I cannot do better than be your disciple” (Plato, 2009). However, his real motive was to expose the faulty logic espoused throughout Athens. The Socratic Method, in effect, allowed Socrates and his followers to probe any statement for logical inconsistency. As with Euthyphro, Socrates’ opponents eventually grew tired of his chiding and simply wished to be done with him; “Another time, Socrates; for I am in a hurry, and must go now” (Plato, 2009). For his followers, however, Socrates’ piety for truth and ability to confound the wise men of Athens engendered loyalty and changed the way they viewed the world around them.

The fourth, and final, I ascribed to transformational leadership is that of Individualized Consideration. The transformational leader who displays Individualized Consideration is one who guides their followers along a path to “becoming fully actualized” by providing individualized support specific to the needs that arise (Northhouse, 2019). On the surface, this can be seen in the Battle of Potidaea where Socrates is credited with saving the life of his follower Alcibiades. However, as a philosopher, Socrates observed the highest form of self-actualization by instructing his followers to *Know Thyself*. To that end, Socrates contended, “the life which is unexamined is not worth living” (Plato, 2009). Socrates looked at each man and asked them to love and pursue the truth both externally and internally. He asked them to “transcend their own self-interests” (Northhouse, 2019). Socrates was not always successful as noted before; Critias, used his influence to have his rivals murdered and greedily seized their assets. Likewise, Alcibiades betrayed his oaths, his countrymen, and his ideals in order to save his own life. Socrates, in his death, would show the error of their ways by denying his followers the ability to make such mistakes on his behalf. He refused their money, disdaining worldly goods, and upheld the judgment of his countrymen by drinking their poison at the expense of his own life.

As a transformational leader, Socrates demanded intellectual rigor from not only his followers but from all Athenians. Though he did not commit his own thoughts to paper, his faithful students Plato and Xenophon saved enough of their friend's words to pass on his demanding style to us (Durant, 1961). Socrates, himself, was not the ideal of what a leader is often perceived to be. He did not display the traits of what we now consider a traditional leader. In spite of this, the gadfly of Athens used his unique intellect and ability to transform those who followed after him to leave an indelible mark on Western civilization. In the end, however, the voice of the master echoes back to us across the ages as we make our assertions. "Socrates was a model example of a transformational leader," claimed the wise young man. "This is wonderful news," observed Socrates. "As such a wise leader yourself, can you explain to me the nature of transformational leadership?"

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